

Enhancing the Council of Europe's external dimension: the North-South Centre's medium-term strategy (2024-2027)

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1. Summary

The European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre - NSC) is a decisive instrument to support the efforts of the Council of Europe member States, as outlined in the Reykjavik Declaration, in their commitment to enhance the Organisation's external dimension. This Strategy builds on the comparative advantage of the Centre and outlines how its objectives can be achieved over the next four years, while taking into account its current constraints as well as lessons learnt. The Strategy (2024-2027) is based on three pillars: (1) enlarging the NSC to other Council of Europe member States and third countries, including in the Southern neighbourhood; (2) refocusing its strategic priorities; and (3) positioning the Centre as the main vehicle to convey the values and instruments of the Council of Europe, particularly in the Southern neighbourhood and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the implementation of the Strategy, the NSC will gradually strengthen its role as the Council of Europe's Centre for Regional Cooperation with the Southern neighbourhood.

2. Introduction

At the Council of Europe's Fourth Summit in Reykjavik (Iceland) in May 2023, the Heads of State and Government of the 46 member States of the Organisation pledged *"to strengthen the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension, through its liaison offices and through a new engagement based on its core values with democracies in the world and its Southern neighbourhood"*¹.

The European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre - NSC) is a decisive instrument to accompany the Council of Europe's external projection and support the achievement of its strategic priorities beyond the European continent. Created in 1989 as an Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) of the Council of Europe, it consists also of non-members of the Council of Europe, with currently four African countries² as member states, bringing the Southern Mediterranean and sub-Saharan African perspective to the debates of the Council of Europe while facilitating a political dialogue with regions outside of Europe. Since its creation, the NSC has offered a pioneering framework for North-South cooperation to raise public awareness of issues of global concern and strengthen commitment - beyond Europe - to universal principles and values in the fields of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law³. While honouring its global mandate, its work has focused primarily on the Southern neighbourhood, and progressively, on Sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Need for a new medium-term Strategy

Although the value of the North-South Centre is particularly recognised in specific specialist circles, the withdrawal of several member States since 2010, including grand payers of the Council of Europe, together with other changes in the international context that included the creation of new

¹Reykjavik Declaration, "United around our values". Available [here](#).

²Algeria, Cabo Verde, Morocco, and Tunisia.

³Resolution [CM/Res\(2011\)6](#) Article 1 – Aims and functions

1.1 The aims of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity ("the Centre") are:

- to promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law through intercultural dialogue and education, in particular among the youth of Europe and its neighbouring regions.

- to provide a framework for European co-operation for the purpose of increasing public awareness of global interdependence and solidarity issues.

- to promote policies of solidarity in conformity with the aims and principles of the Council of Europe, by fostering dialogue and co-operation between Europe and non-European countries in neighbouring regions.

organisations with closely related mandates, detracted the Centre from political relevance and limited its resources and operational capacity.

Taking stock from previous diagnosis about the North-South Centre and the new political momentum at the Council of Europe, Malta's Chairpersonship of the Executive Committee launched a round of consultations with the members of the NSC, concluding that there is a need to revitalize the NSC's work and activities so that the Centre finds its place again in the new Council of Europe and multilateral architecture with a clear added-value for the current member States to stay, as well as to attract new member States, and appeal to old ones to return.

The timing, with the recently adopted Reykjavik Declaration at the highest political level at the Summit in Iceland, makes this strategy all the more relevant, as through it, the Centre precises its contribution to the implementation of the Decision taken by the Heads of State and Government in particular on the external dimension and importance of the youth perspective.

The **present Strategy also** responds to the Secretary General's decision to strengthen the links between the Council of Europe's Neighbourhood Policy and the NSC by promoting coordinated programming, including through the use of regional cooperation instruments for the Southern neighbourhood. It also aligns with the will of the Committee of Ministers which, in the context of the review of the Neighbourhood Policy in 2021, stressed the need to *"strengthen the institutional coherence and coordination of those of its bodies currently associated with the Neighbourhood Policy (including the North-South Centre)"*⁴.

Moreover, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Council of Europe member States gathered in Turin in 2022 highlighted that the **NSC is a key instrument of the neighbourhood policy and, more generally, of the Organisation's contribution to international order and global governance, as well as to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. On that basis, the NSC is expected to evolve into the Council of Europe's Centre for Regional Cooperation with the Southern neighbourhood.

4. Strategic Objectives and Action

The Strategy aims to **increase and consolidate the Council of Europe's contribution to international order and global governance by building on the comparative advantage of the NSC**.

The following distinctive features give it its comparative advantage:

- its **excellence in certain areas** such as education for democratic citizenship, intercultural dialogue, interreligious/interfaith dialogue, youth cooperation and women empowerment.
- governance based on the **quadrilogue** is also applied as a methodology in its activities. The Quadrilogue provides a framework for **political dialogue**, mobilising representatives of governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities, and civil society from different regions of the world, thereby contributing to the development of **networking** with non-member countries of the Council of Europe on issues of common concern.
- the **involvement of civil society on an equal footing** with the other partners in the quadrilogue being particularly noteworthy, with its strong **network of youth organisations**

⁴ SG/Inf(2021)14. *Review of the Policy towards neighbouring regions and the Council of Europe contribution to global governance*. Available [here](#)

that support the foundations of a structured, inclusive, and sustainable approach with a multiplier effect among young people.

- its **geographical scope**, open to member and non-member States of the Council of Europe, with a focus on the **Southern neighbourhood and sub-Saharan Africa**, which has the potential to multiply the Council of Europe's work in these regions and beyond.

In order to make further progress in this area, the implementation of the present Strategy has the following **objectives**:

- (1) **Enlarging** to other Council of Europe member States and third countries, including those in the Southern neighbourhood.
- (2) **Refocusing of strategic priorities**, their full alignment with Council of Europe programming, and their implementation in close coordination with other instruments (in particular the South Programme).
- (3) Positioning the Centre as the main **instrument to convey the values and instruments of the Council of Europe** in the Southern neighbourhood and in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the potential to amplify the Council of Europe's mission worldwide.

The strategy covers the period 2024-2027 to align with the Council of Europe's strategic programme and enhance the measurability of its achievements.

4.1. Enlargement of the Centre and possibility of Associate Membership

Given its mission, which focuses on global issues, the relevance of the NSC over the next few years will depend on its ability to attract new member States, as well as retaining its current members.

To achieve this, it is now essential to enhance the visibility of the NSC and its actions. As an **Enlarged Partial Agreement**, all its actions must have a **comparative advantage**, built upon the unique features that set it apart. With a clear added value, the NSC should be able to progressively integrate new countries that express interest in its work. This is prerequisite for ensuring the depth of exchanges and proposals, the broad scope of its action, and **assurance of its legitimacy in addressing global issues**. Furthermore, enlargement is an essential condition for its longer-term **financial sustainability**.

To enable a better understanding and appreciation of the NSC's work under this Strategy, the Executive Committee may decide to associate interested countries to the NSC's activities. The Associate Member status may only be availed of one time and for a maximum duration of two years⁵. **Associate Member countries** can participate in the Executive Committee meetings without voting rights and attend all other NSC activities. If an Associate Member voluntarily contributes an amount equal to or exceeding the lowest ordinary contribution made by member states, they will **enjoy the benefits of a member State** for the corresponding financial year.

Furthermore, the NSC should continue demonstrating its added value to the current member States. Accordingly, under the present Strategy, only NSC member States and Associate Members meeting the voluntary contribution criteria mentioned above will have the opportunity to **host activities** in their country, unless otherwise decided by the Executive Committee. Similarly, the events organised by the Centre will give priority to the **participation of experts** from its member states. Finally, **training activities** will give priority to youth organisations from beneficiary countries in the Southern neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as from NSC member states.

⁵ Modalities for Associate Members in Annex 1.

4.2. Refocused Strategic Priorities

In order to support the Council of Europe more effectively in its global projection, the NSC's work needs to be better anchored in the **triangle of "human rights, democracy, and rule of law"**, while continuing to fulfil the Centre's mission. As such, the Strategy is aligned with the Programme and Budget quadrennium of the Council of Europe 2024-2027.⁶

The establishment of **biennial priorities** will enable the NSC to concentrate its efforts and resources on topical themes while being more prospective and innovative. It will also encourage close coordination with other Council of Europe sectors as required. Furthermore, the two-year cycle will allow for predictability, consistency and delving in depth on the priority issues selected.

The **Lisbon Forum** remains one of the NSC's flagship events, offering a privileged framework for addressing issues of common interest to Europe and its Southern neighbourhood, while gradually involving other regions of the world. With a solid reputation and the ability to mobilise high-level representatives from different levels representing national authorities and civil society, the Lisbon Forum promotes dialogue on global issues using a prospective approach. The Lisbon Forum is therefore an ideal platform for initiating discussions on the priority issues selected for the two-year cycle.

With this new approach, the Lisbon 2023 Forum, organised in close collaboration with the Directorate-General for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, took a closer look at a topical issue: the impact of economic crimes, particularly corruption, on the environment, and the role of young people in this context. Drawing on the distinctive features of the NSC, including the active participation of youth organisations, and aiming to contribute to the implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration, the Forum reached a consensus on how to address this globally significant topic. Based on the Forum's recommendations, the NSC endowed itself with the means to launch a concrete initiative, establishing a **Rule of Law Youth Network (RoLYN)**⁷, which will concentrate a significant part of the NSC's efforts during the 2024/25 cycle.

The **Lisbon Forum** will therefore be held every two years, officially launching the biennial priorities. To enhance the Forum's visibility, its programme will span at least two full days, featuring parallel workshops and other interactive activities to allow deeper reflection, exchanges and networking among all participants. This approach will allow the Lisbon Forum to play a key role in the prospective analysis of the main theme that will be at the centre of the NSC's biennial efforts.

In rotation, another major event, a "**North-South Intercultural Conference**" will be held every second year, alternating with the Lisbon Forum. These conferences will take place in any NSC member State, addressing topical intercultural issues, including interreligious/interfaith dialogue. This will ensure proper coverage of this other important dimension of the Centre's work through a highly visible event.

⁶ It will be rolled out over two successive two-year periods (2024/25 and 2026/27).

⁷ Launched at the 29th Lisbon Forum under the title "Human Rights, Environment and Economic Crimes: Young People on the Front Line", RoLYN will be made up of representatives of youth organisations, associations and/or networks appointed for a two-year term. During its first two years (2024-2025), RoLYN's work will aim to promote and raise awareness of the links between corruption and environmental degradation and to encourage action by young people in this field.

4.3. The NSC, a main instrument to spread the Council of Europe's values and tools beyond Europe

The North-South Centre has a long trajectory of cooperation with other regions of the world, having played a leading role in countries of the Southern neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, its methodology and some of its flagship events give the NSC a facilitating role in **political dialogue and networking** with other regions.

4.3.1. Southern Neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa

Since 2011, the North-South Centre has largely focused its attention on the Southern neighbourhood. At the same time, the **Council of Europe's Policy towards neighbouring regions**, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2011, has been a major success in this region. This success underscores the relevance of the standards established by the Council of Europe beyond the European continent and constitutes a working model for other regions around the world. It aligns with one of the objectives of the Reykjavik Declaration, which is to increase awareness of Council of Europe standards and legal instruments, with the ultimate aim of non-member states acceding to its open conventions⁸.

During the evaluation exercise ten years after its adoption⁹ and following the Committee of Ministers (CM) Ministerial meeting in Turin in 2022, the relevance and desirability of maximising the Neighbourhood Policy's interactions with the NSC as part of its implementation was confirmed.

The **Joint Work Programme of the NSC and the South Programme (2023-2025)**, adopted by the Executive Committee at its extraordinary meeting on 24 March 2023, establishes enhanced synergies between the Council of Europe's Neighbourhood Policy with the Southern Mediterranean and the Council of Europe's North-South Centre. In addition, the NSC has gradually extended its activities to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, a direction that should be resolutely pursued with the **active support of countries** in the Southern Mediterranean region present at the Centre.

With over 230 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the largest youth population in the world¹⁰. In addition, almost half the population of the Middle East and North Africa region is under 30¹¹. The networks of youth organisations with which the NSC has been working for several decades, and which continue to expand, are a fundamental tool for cooperation today. At a time marked by the rise of populism and democratic disengagement, young people play a key role in defending and promoting the fundamental values defended by the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The youth perspective – as highlighted in the Reykjavik Declaration, is critical as the participation of young people in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and

⁸ The results of the Neighbourhood Policy, aimed at the gradual creation of a common legal space, speak for themselves: 19 accessions to key Council of Europe conventions including the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Convention on the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data, or the Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention), and the procedures underway for countries in the region to accede to these and others such as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

⁹ See above pp4.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme Regional Service Centre for Africa (2023) *Youth in Africa: a demographic imperative for peace and security*. Available [here](#), accessed 27 October 2023.

¹¹ OECD (2022). *Youth at the Centre of Government Action. A Review of the Middle East and North Africa*. Available [here](#), accessed 27 October 2023

strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue. Young people can, through various means of action as well as their energy and fresh ideas, influence their peers and act as catalysts for change in policies. They are after all the future. For these reasons, involving and **investing in young people is essential to promoting inclusive and sustainable reforms**. By mobilising youth organisations and raising awareness of the Council of Europe's values, principles, and standards among young people in the Southern neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa, the NSC will gradually be able to rely on multipliers of the Council of Europe's values **who are likely to become agents of change** in present and future societies.

In this context, strategic cooperation between the NSC and the **Council of Europe's Youth Department** will be strengthened to facilitate the complementarity of activities and the strengthening of cooperation with neighbouring regions in the youth field. The NSC will continue to participate as an observer in the meetings of the **European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ)**.

Furthermore, in view of the profound changes that affect the countries of the Southern Mediterranean region, the NSC will organise initiatives to stimulate reflection both, within the Executive Committee, and during other events organised by the NSC. This reflection will contribute to position the NSC at the cutting edge of prospective issues. The NSC will regularly invite experts, members of think tanks and academia from Europe and the Southern neighbourhood to exchange views with the Executive Committee, to contribute to its reflection, and maximise the relevance of the NSC's action.

4.3.2. Co-operation with other regions

Beyond the Southern neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa, the NSC has the potential to reach out and collaborate with other countries in a "neighbourhood of values" close to those of the Council of Europe in support of its external projection. It is therefore suggested that the Centre's activities could gradually extend to other countries on their demand, while maintaining the geographical and thematic prioritisation that is part of this Strategy. In particular, the participation of Latin American countries in the work of the NSC, which increased over the last decade, will be encouraged following a demand-driven approach. The active contribution of observer States of the Council of Europe could be used to this end.

5. Implementation

5.1. Methodology

Any action organised by the NSC should reflect its **distinctive features** in terms of the topic, the geographical scope and the methodology applied. Importantly, NSC activities should involve **countries from the Southern Mediterranean region and/or sub-Saharan Africa** wherever possible. To achieve its objectives, the NSC will rely mainly on its **networks of civil society and youth organisations** and will devote efforts to continue expanding this network in Africa. The NSC will use the "**quadrilogue**" as widely as possible as a means of reaching a large audience and facilitating political dialogue.

5.2. Coordination

The NSC works in close cooperation with the **Directorate of Political Affairs and External Relations (DPAER)**, which is responsible for coordinating the external dimension of the Council of Europe, and acts under the responsibility of the **Directorate of Programme Coordination (DPC)**, in regards to the implementation of cooperation projects.

The coordination and implementation of the present Strategy will rely on the **coordination team** of the Neighbourhood Policy with the Southern Mediterranean from **Lisbon** under the responsibility of its Regional Coordinator, who also assumes the role of Executive Director of the NSC. The Council of Europe offices in Rabat and Tunis will play a key role too in the implementation of this Strategy. The coordination team will ensure the interface with the relevant CoE Major Administrative Entities.

On the initiative of the Secretary General and in agreement with the Portuguese authorities, the NSC will gradually become the **Council of Europe's Centre for Regional Cooperation** with the Southern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa. Portugal offers a privileged geographical location for promoting cooperation between Europe, the African continent, and the Middle East, as well as for hosting regional events.

Lastly, the NSC will devote efforts to coordinate the action of the main international actors in the region, primarily on the biennial issues covered by its work (e.g., the Union for the Mediterranean, United Nations, League of Arab States, or the Arab League of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation).

5.3. Governance

The Executive Committee will supervise the implementation of the Strategy, through exchanges of views based on half-yearly reports prepared by the secretariat.

The annual meetings of the Executive Committee will be held alternately in Strasbourg (in the second half of the year) and Lisbon (in the first half of the year) with the latter held back-to-back with the Award Ceremony of the North-South Prize in Lisbon to encourage the participation of its members in this prestigious event. The Bureau of the Executive Committee will meet prior to each of the two respective Executive Committee meetings for the sake of efficiency.

To ensure the participation of the main actors and its articulation with other relevant international events, the NSC's flagship initiatives will be held according to a calendar to be agreed by the Executive Committee on an annual basis.

At least once a year, the Executive Director of the North-South Centre shall participate in an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers.

5.4. Evaluation, Monitoring and Learning (MEL)

Integrated in the Council of Europe Programme and Budget's quadrennium 2024-2027, this Strategy follows a Result Based Management (RBM) approach, and its results will be monitored against the intervention logic designed for the NSC in the Sub-Programme: "Democratic Governance and Dialogue: Civil Society"¹².

More specifically, the progress of this Strategy will be measured against the objectives and targets described in Table A below with an annual written report.

¹² For reference consult document NSC/EC(2023)11

Objective	Target by end of 2027	Indicators
Enlargement	At least 5 countries are granted Associate Member status. At least 2 countries request accession to the EPA.	Number of associate/membership requests/ expressions of interest.
Networking	New youth organisations from at least 15 MENA and Sub-Saharan African countries are included in NSC networks.	Number of applicant youth organisations/ expressions of interest/ number of participating youth organisations.
External and internal visibility	Adoption of Communication and Visibility Action Plan by the Executive Committee by March 2024. Constitution of a Group of friends of the NSC. Introduction of a regular Newsletter.	Yearly assessments of implementation of Strategy's visibility Action Plan. High level representation in events. Reach out statistics (web, social media, traditional media, newsletter). Requests for information/ participation in NSC activities. Regular exchanges of views NSC with GR-EXT/ CM.
Contribution to Neighbourhood Policy with the Southern Mediterranean region	Involvement of civil society organisations and NSC youth networks in at least 20 activities of the Neighbourhood Policy. Contribution to raise awareness on key CoE conventions in at least 10 events of the NSC.	Qualitative feed-back of civil society/ youth representatives on CoE values/ standards. Statistics on youth participation in relevant events.
Increased internal and external coordination on specific themes	Internal: all NSC priority areas of work are implemented in close collaboration with relevant CoE sectors. External: NSC takes the lead in coordination with other relevant international actors of at least 1 priority area	Internal: Number of events organised jointly with other CoE sectors. External: NSC work coordinated with other relevant international actors.
Enhanced Financial Sustainability	Budget increase of at least +15% because of new accessions and extra-budgetary resources	New member States pay their contributions. Associate members allocate voluntary

		contributions to the North-South Centre's projects. Increased extra-budgetary funds.
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5.5. Communication

A Communication Strategy will be issued to give greater visibility to the actions and concrete achievements of the NSC.

Aligned with the above-mentioned objectives and the new Communication Strategy, a "Group of Friends of the North-South Centre" made of distinguished personalities whose work is closely related to the work of the Centre or who have been associated with the Centre in the past, will contribute to raise the NSC's profile and promote its actions' visibility.

A regular newsletter will also be circulated to the member states, associate members and all Council of Europe member states sharing the main outcomes of the latest work and activities held and also present the forthcoming events until the next newsletter.

Annex 1 – Modalities regulating the status of Associate Member

1. Any member or observer State of the Council of Europe, as well as any other State may request to be invited to participate to the EPA as an Associate Member by notification of a diplomatic representative addressed to the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre
2. The Chairperson shall acknowledge receipt of the request and inform the Executive Committee without delay.
3. A consultation process shall be launched within the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre. The consultation is launched by the North-South Centre secretariat either by administrative procedure or at one of the meetings of its Executive Committee.
4. The decision shall be adopted by the Executive Committee as a whole, by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast and by a majority of the members of the Executive Committee, including the favourable vote of at least half of the members having voted, as designated under Article 4.2a Resolution CM/Res(2011)6. Deliberations will be confidential.
5. In the case the vote of the Executive Committee is positive, the Associate Member status for the State concerned come into effect on the 1st day of the month following approval by the Executive Committee
6. The Associate Member status may only be availed of one time and for a maximum duration of two years.
7. Associate Members may participate in the meetings of the EPA without the right to vote. Associate Members may make oral or written statements in the meetings of the EPA.
8. If an Associate Member makes a voluntary contribution to the Centre of an amount that is above or at the least equivalent to the lowest ordinary contribution by its member States, it will be able to enjoy the benefits of a member State during that financial year in which the contribution was made.
9. Any Associate Member may withdraw from the EPA by means of a notification sent to the Chairperson of the Executive Committee
10. The Chair shall acknowledge receipt of the notification and inform the Executive Committee.
11. The withdrawal of an Associate Member shall come into effect upon receipt of the notification.
12. The Executive Committee may decide that any Associate Member acting in a manner inconsistent with the mandate of the EPA or impeding its functions, ceases to be an Associate Member as from such date as the Executive Committee determines.